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Two Ex-Officials Pursued Iran Deal

Two former high-ranking government officials were an integral part of the secret arms/hostage negotiations with Iran. They are retired Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord and Thomas Cline, a one-time top member of the CIA's covert operations branch.

We were first to disclose the secret negotiations with Iran. We reported early this year that Israel was the designated conduit for the sale of arms to Tehran until the National Security Council decided late last year to "regularize" the weapons shipments by sending them directly from the United States.

We also reported that former CIA and Pentagon officials were involved in the secret talks with Iran over the hostages and other issues. The Reagan administration appealed to us to keep secret the details of the mission, and even now there are some things we will not disclose.

But we can say that Secord and Cline, known to have excellent contacts in the Middle East, were dispatched to the region to dicker over the hostages' release. Their mission had the approval of Robert C. McFarlane, then the president's national security adviser, who later flew to Iran himself to negotiate.

Cline was director of training for clandestine operations at the CIA until he left in 1978. He was linked to renegade CIA agent Edwin Wilson, who was selling explosives to Libya and is now in prison.

After a lengthy grand jury investigation that directly followed columns we wrote about a multimillion-dollar scandal in the shipment of U.S.

arms to Egypt, Cline was indicted for fraud. In 1984, he pleaded guilty to filing false invoices with the Defense Department and was fined \$10,000.

Secord is a West Point graduate, a much-decorated combat pilot and a former deputy assistant secretary of defense. He is known to have good contacts with various Arab governments, and in 1981 was instrumental in persuading the Senate to approve President Reagan's sale of AWACS radar surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia.

Since McFarlane's departure as national security adviser last year, primary responsibility for the negotiations with Iran rested on one man at the National Security Council: Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, deputy director for political affairs.

Neither Secord nor Cline could be reached for comment. Their clandestine mission for the White House involved nothing illegal, of course. A National Security Council spokesman would not comment on "the assignments of staff."

California Pals Miffed: Donald T. Regan's tenure as White House chief of staff has left Reagan's old-time California henchmen grumbling. One veteran Reaganaut who has left the White House for another agency complained that the president is no longer given a list of policy options to decide among. Instead, he is presented with a yes-or-no decision on a single solution worked out by Regan and his staff. Usually, the amiable president approves the suggestion. The California veterans resent what they see as a power grab by Regan and say that the president has always functioned better by having options to choose among.